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## Political Conflict in France

BY JOHN C. deWILDE

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# Political Conflict in France

BY JOHN C. deWILDE

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ON April 26 and May 3 the French people will go to the polls for the quadrennial elections to the Chamber of Deputies, the chief legislative organ in France. During the last four years parliamentary institutions have been seriously weakened by their apparent inability to arrest the ravages of the economic crisis. Economic and political discontent has fostered the rapid growth of extra-parliamentary leagues and groups, whose Fascist or semi-Fascist tenets and militant activities have been a constant source of trouble to the government. Against these organizations sponsored or favored by the conservative Right, the Radical Left has mobilized its forces in the so-called Popular Front. In the present electoral campaign the issues between Left and Right are more closely drawn than at any time since the war. The political complexion of the Parliament resulting from the elections will determine whether France will have a strong and stable government, capable of solving the serious domestic and foreign problems which confront the country, without sacrificing the hard-won individual liberties of the existing democratic régime.

## POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS

In the present Chamber of Deputies there are no less than nineteen political groups and, to add to the confusion, most of these bear misleading names. A number of groups in the Chamber are no more than loose aggregations of like-minded individuals and do not represent political parties. No really well-organized and disciplined parties exist except on the Left. Unless strongly imbued with political and economic doctrines, the average Frenchman will vote for an individual rather than for a party label. The electoral system, too, is conducive to numerous parties and independent candidacies; if there is no majority for any one candidate, a second balloting takes place a week later, when a plurality is decisive. If only one ballot were taken, there would be a tendency for nearly

similar parties to pool their strength, and the number of individual candidates would decrease.

The political complexion of the Chamber of Deputies may be more easily understood if the groups and parties are classified in three categories: the conservative Right, the moderate Centre, and the radical Left. Within each of these categories, particularly on the Left, there are further gradations in political and social philosophy. Membership in the various groups fluctuates, so that the political constitution of the Chamber is never quite the same at the end as at the beginning of its four-year term. The table below illustrates these changes in the Chamber whose mandate is about to expire.

COMPOSITION OF CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES				
Membership July 1932			Membership January 1936	
GROUPS OF THE RIGHT				
81	14	Independents	10	71
	18	Republican and Social Group	14	
	8	Economic, Social and Peasant Action	5	
	41	Republican Federation	42	
GROUPS OF THE CENTRE				
156	36	Republican Centre	31	151
	28	Republicans of the Left	32	
	16	Popular Democrats	12	
	6	Republicans of the Centre	7	
	23	Independents of the Left	25	
	47	Radical Left	44	
GROUPS OF THE LEFT				
350	160	Radical Socialists	152	333
	15	Independent Left	16	
	12	Republican Socialists	5	
	13	French Socialists	3	
	.....	Socialists of France	3	
	.....	Socialist and Republican Union	39	
	131	Socialists	95	
	9	Party of Proletarian Unity	10	
	10	Communists	10	
28	UNCLASSIFIED			47
615	TOTAL			602

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*The Right.* Furthest to the Right is the small group known as the Independents, which comprises the ultra-conservatives. It includes five or six Royalists, although the Royalist party—called the *Action Française*—has no representatives in Parliament. Next come two loosely organized groupings of conservative deputies who were for the most part elected independently. They are the Republican and Social group and the Independents for Economic, Social and Peasant Action. Closely akin to them is the only fairly homogeneous party of the Right, known as the Republican Federation. Headed since 1925 by Louis Marin, this party draws its chief support from the upper bourgeoisie and big industrial interests. Since it is opposed to the anti-clerical legislation enacted by the Third Republic, it also receives the votes of many devout Catholics in all classes. The Federation defends private initiative against government intervention in business, and in foreign policy is extremely nationalistic. In 1932 this party polled 1,233,360 votes, or almost 13 per cent of all the votes cast.

*The Centre.* The most important party of the Centre, about equal in strength to the Republican Federation, is the Democratic Alliance whose president is the relatively youthful Pierre-Etienne Flandin. In the Chamber, however, the deputies elected under the party's banners are divided into four groups: the Republican Centre, including Louis Rollin and M. Patenôtre-Desnoyers; the Republicans of the Left, of which MM. Flandin, Baréty and Piétri are members; the Independents of the Left; and finally, the Republicans of the Centre, comprising conservative deputies from Alsace-Lorraine who lean toward regional autonomy. The Democratic Alliance is pre-eminently the party of commerce and industry, and as such its program is not markedly different from that of the Republican Federation. Under the leadership of M. Flandin, however, the party has progressed in a more liberal direction, and the influence of such spokesmen of big industry as André Tardieu has diminished. It is less intransigent in foreign policy than the Republican Federation and more disposed to cooperate with the moderate Left, notably the Radical Socialists.

To the Centre belongs also the small Popular Democratic party, which polled 309,336 votes in the 1932 elections. It is led by M. Champetier de Ribes and is in reality a sort of Christian Socialist party. In espousing liberal social legislation, the Popular Democrats tend toward the Left, but in other respects they are conservative. In addition, there is the so-called Radical Left over which M. Louis de Chappedelaine presides. This group lacks any real homogeneity, although it consists primarily of independents who formerly belonged to the Radical Socialist party and resigned from it owing to its periodic flirtations with the Socialists.

*The Left.* The Radical Socialists constitute the largest party of the Left. In 1932 this party polled 1,836,991 votes, or almost 20 per cent of the total. The Socialists actually received a slightly larger vote, but the Radical

Socialist representation is the largest in the Chamber because its candidates traditionally benefit from the support of other Left groups on the second ballot. Although the party is really neither radical nor socialist, it considers itself the heir of the French Revolution and its traditions, as symbolized by the concepts of progress, liberty, equality and fraternity. The Radical Socialists are the most ardent defenders of the Republic and its democratic institutions against fascism and the Church. Representing primarily the interests of the lower middle classes—peasants, shopkeepers, small business men and government employees—the Radical Socialists share their constituents' distrust of the big industrial and financial interests usually described as the *féodalités économiques*. In practice, however, the party has shrunk from radical economic legislation when in power. In the future it may adopt a more radical course, for the conservative wing—led by such men as Herriot, Caillaux, Sarraut and Marchandau—seems to be losing influence. The younger radical wing, which favors advanced forms of economic planning and state control over finance and industry, is now in the ascendancy. Among its leaders are Edouard Daladier, who replaced Herriot as president of the party in January 1936, Pierre Cot, Jean Zay and Jacques Kayser. In the realm of foreign policy, the Radical Socialists are partisans of national defense, but at the same time strongly support collective security as embodied in the League of Nations.

Between the Radical Socialists and the orthodox Socialists there are four other Left groups. The first is the Independent Left, which consists primarily of dissident Radical Socialists. The other three are so-called Socialist parties—the Republican Socialists, French Socialists and Socialists of France. All three represent the reformist type of socialism and in practice tend to favor a modified form of capitalism. The Socialists of France are the most recent offshoot from the Socialist party. They seceded in 1933, in the belief that the Socialists were playing into the hands of the Fascists and conservatives by refusing to collaborate constructively in a government of the Left. These "neo-Socialists" are themselves sometimes called "Fascists of the Left." They reject the doctrine of class struggle, advocate national defense, and espouse a planned economy appealing to the middle classes as well as the proletariat. This new party, sponsored by several promising young deputies, including Marcel Déat and Adrien Marquet, has not been as successful as was originally anticipated. In the fall of 1935 it coalesced with the other two minor socialist groups in the Chamber to form the Socialist and Republican Union, of which Joseph Paul-Boncour was made president. This fusion added one more group to the Chamber, since a few members of each of the three groups affected refused to join.

The orthodox Socialist party, affiliated with the Second International, polled 1,964,384 votes in 1932, and has the second largest representation in the Chamber. Although made more homogeneous by the seces-

sion of the "neo-Socialists," the party remains somewhat divided between a more conservative wing represented by Vincent Auriol and Jules Moch, and a radical wing headed by Jean Zyromski and Marceau Pivert. Léon Blum, the leader of the party, holds an even hand between these two factions. The Socialists draw their support not only from workingmen, but from the lower middle classes, particularly peasants and low-paid government employees. In a special effort to win over the farmers, it has promised to exempt peasant landholdings from expropriation. Despite the partial middle-class basis of the party the Socialists continue to oppose, at least in theory, all "reformist" socialism and remain on the whole hostile to participation in bourgeois governments.

To the Left of the Socialist party are two Communist groups, each of which at present has 10 members in the Chamber. The first is called the Party of Proletarian Unity and comprises mainly deputies who have been excluded by or have resigned from the official Communist party. These dissident Communists have no large popular following as a party and depend for election primarily on personal popularity in the districts they represent. The Communist party, affiliated with the Third International, received 796,630 votes in 1932 and as many as 1,070,000 in 1928. On the basis of proportional representation, it would have 51 instead of 10 deputies in the Chamber. That it has so few members in Parliament is due primarily to the fact that the system of representation (the so-called single-member constituency) prevents it from fully utilizing its voting strength which is concentrated chiefly in a few districts—the industrial suburbs of Paris and certain other industrial towns. Moreover, until recently its hostility to the Socialists and other groups of the Left prevented it from entering into any electoral alliances which might have increased its parliamentary representation. The leader of the party is Marcel Cachin, who in October 1935 became the first Communist elected to the Senate. The Communist group in the Chamber is led by the party's general secretary, Maurice Thorez.<sup>1</sup>

## WORK OF THE NATIONAL UNION GOVERNMENTS

The 1932 elections marked a clear-cut victory for the Left, which obtained slightly more than 350 of the 615 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and received about 60 per cent of the popular vote.<sup>2</sup> The Left, however, proved incapable of forming a stable government. Negotiations for the formation of a ministry in which Socialists as well

as Radical Socialists would participate broke down,<sup>3</sup> and the Radical Socialists were compelled to form minority governments. Under these circumstances ministerial instability, the bane of French politics, was greatly aggravated, and the development of firm and consistent financial and economic policies became well-nigh impossible. Within 19 months—June 1932 to February 1934—France had six cabinets. Discontent mounted as successive ministries proved unable to arrest progressive deterioration in government credit and finance and to cope with other serious problems. Extra-parliamentary groups, such as the *Jeunesses Patriotes*, the *Solidarité Française* and the *Croix de Feu*, grew rapidly, agitating against Parliament and demanding a more authoritarian government. The revelation of the now famous Stavisky financial scandal, which involved a number of deputies, provided the signal for the open outbreak of discontent. After a night of the severest rioting Paris has known since the days of the Commune in 1871, the Radical Socialist minority of Edouard Daladier resigned. It was succeeded by a Government of National Union headed by Gaston Doumergue and including representatives from the Right, the Centre, the Radical Socialists and the "neo-Socialists" of the Left.<sup>4</sup>

Four different Premiers were at the helm from February 1934 to January 1936. Gaston Doumergue was Premier until November 8, 1934; his successor, Pierre-Etienne Flandin held office until May 31, 1935; and after a four-day interregnum by Fernand Bouisson from June 1-4, Pierre Laval formed the National Government which stayed in power until the Radical Socialists precipitated its fall on January 22, 1936. The government which took office on January 24 under the Radical Socialist Senator, Albert Sarraut, still includes representatives of the Centre and Right but, unlike its predecessors, relies primarily on the Left for support.

The National Union governments faced three primary tasks: to balance the budget, re-establish confidence in the government's credit, and at the same time stimulate economic recovery; to formulate a foreign policy which would keep France

1. For a more detailed survey of parties and their programs, cf. Fernand Corcos, *Catéchisme des Partis Politiques* (Paris, Montaignes, 1932); André Siegfried, *Tableau des Partis en France* (Paris, Grasset, 1931); also Albert Thibaudet, *Les Idées Politiques de la France* (Paris, Stock, 1932), and B. M. E. Léger, *Les Opinions Politiques des Provinces Françaises* (Paris, Gamber, 1934), particularly pp. 5-43.

2. Out of a total vote of 9,579,482, the Right received 1,316,219, the Centre 2,564,498, and the Left 5,691,653 votes. Cf. Léger, *Les Opinions Politiques des Provinces Françaises*, cited, p. 36.

3. For the history of these negotiations, cf. Edouard Herriot, "Les Négotiations de mai-juin 1932 entre Socialistes et Radicaux," *Documents Radicaux No. 1* (published by the Radical Socialist party).

4. For a survey of French politics from June 1932 to June 1934, cf. John C. deWilde, "Political Ferment in France," *Foreign Policy Reports*, July 18, 1934.

secure from attack; and to minimize the dangerous domestic unrest and strife which had developed, and bring about general political appeasement. In addition, the Doumergue ministry undertook to strengthen the executive authority by constitutional revision, but this attempt failed when the Radical Socialists refused to support it and brought about the government's defeat.

#### THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND DEFLATION

France was at first not seriously affected by the economic depression. A fair balance between industry and agriculture, a relatively even distribution of wealth, and conservative business practices combined to keep French economic life comparatively stable. In time, however, severe contraction of foreign trade and the tourist traffic, which are of vital importance to France, put an end to French immunity. The departure of Britain and the entire sterling bloc from the gold standard affected France adversely. Exports slumped and the rising tide of bankruptcies testified to the increasing unprofitability of business. No sooner had the

country begun to recover from this first shock when the depreciation of the dollar brought a new and more severe setback. As Britain, the United States and other countries began slowly to recover from the depression, France continued to retrogress. In order to recover, it was compelled to adjust its prices and costs of production to those of countries which had devalued or depreciated their currencies. This could be accomplished in either of two ways. Prices and costs might be lowered by curtailment of wages, salaries and interest rates in private enterprise, and by drastic reductions in public expenditures; or they might be decreased in terms of gold by following the example of other countries and devaluing or lowering the gold content of the franc. France chose the first or deflationary method, primarily because devaluation was and remains an unpopular expedient. The French currency has been devalued once before—in 1928—when the franc was stabilized at a fifth of its pre-war value. The millions of Frenchmen of all classes who suffered from the post-war inflation believe, rightly or wrongly, that further devaluation means another inflation.<sup>5</sup>

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL SITUATION IN FRANCE

	Index of industrial production	Number of bankruptcies (monthly average)	Foreign trade <sup>1</sup> (in million francs)		Wholesale price index	Cost of living index		Number of unemployed on relief	Ordinary budget deficit	Railway deficit (in millions of francs)	Internal public deficit
			Imports	Exports		Paris	45 Départements				
1929	100	726	4,852	4,178	100	100	.....	928	.....	303 <sup>2</sup>	.....
1930	100.4	756	4,376	3,570	88.4	104.5	100	2,514	2,638	1,297	264,437
1931	88.9	906	3,517	2,536	80.0	102.3	96.9	56,112	5,508	2,624	269,037
1932	69.0	1,170	2,484	1,642	68.2	94.6	90.6	273,412	6,017 <sup>3</sup>	3,681	286,696
1933	76.7	1,147	2,369	1,539	63.6	93.5	87.1	276,033	7,036	3,978	297,651
1934	71.0	1,254	1,922	1,485	60.0	92.8	83.4	345,033	8,000	3,956	316,548
1935	67.0	1,239 <sup>4</sup>	1,745	1,289	54.0	86.8	78.3	426,336	5,000 <sup>5</sup>	4,606 <sup>6</sup>	333,376 <sup>6</sup>

1. Monthly average. 2. Surplus. 3. Nine months only. 4. Ten months. 5. Estimate. 6. End of August 1935.

Deflation did not prove an easy course. Reduction of government expenses was particularly difficult. Government employees, war veterans and retired functionaries resisted economies at their expense and were able to enlist the support of Communists, Socialists and even a large part of the Radical Socialists. The serious international situation and the growth of unemployment called for larger expenditures on armaments and relief of distress. The process of deflation, moreover, was attended by a further decline in economic ac-

tivity, entailing a continuous fall in tax receipts and resort to heavy government borrowing, which prevented a reduction of interest rates. The government also had to borrow to cover the growing operating deficit of the French railways.

Although the Radical Socialist ministries which preceded the advent of the national governments had made many piece-meal economies,<sup>6</sup> the deficits in the 1932 and 1933 budgets totaled more than 13

5. It has been estimated that there are from eight to ten million owners of securities in France. Of these, about three-fourths own government bonds or bonds guaranteed by the state. In addition, the savings banks have almost 20 million accounts. Cf. Pierre Frédéric, *Etat des Forces en France* (Paris, Gallimard, 1935), pp. 71-72.

6. An excellent survey of government finances since June 1932 may be found in the report on the 1936 budget made to the Chamber of Deputies by Léon Baréty, rapporteur of the Finance Commission. *Rapport fait au nom de la Commission des Finances chargée d'examiner le projet de loi portant fixation du Budget Général de l'exercice 1936* (Paris, Imprimerie de la Chambre des Députés, 1935), Tome I (hereafter cited as *Report of the Finance Commission of the Chamber of Deputies on the 1936 Budget*).



billion francs. When the Doumergue government came into office it immediately obtained from Parliament—in the budget law of February 28, 1934—special powers to effect by decree the savings necessary to balance the budget. By 41 decree laws issued from April 4 to June 30, government expenses were reduced about 3,200 million francs. Salaries were slashed from 5 to 10 per cent, pensions revised, and benefits paid to war veterans cut by 3 per cent.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, however, Parliament in June 1934 made an additional appropriation of 3,120 million francs for national defense, to be spent over a four-year period and defrayed by further loans. A concession was also made to the widespread demand that public works be inaugurated to relieve unemployment. A law enacted on July 7, 1934 permitted local governments and the railways to borrow from the social insurance fund for the purpose of carrying out public works.<sup>8</sup>

The government of Pierre-Etienne Flandin, who succeeded M. Doumergue in November 1934, abandoned for a time the policy of deflation. Public finances, however, continued to deteriorate rapidly. The year closed with a deficit of about eight billion francs and added 20 billion to the public debt. The Flandin government sought to finance the deficit with short-term Treasury bills which it hoped would attract hoarded capital. To this end it persuaded the Bank of France to grant 30-day loans on government bonds not exceeding a maturity of two years.<sup>9</sup> These measures, however, were not sufficient to arrest the increasing distrust of government credit aroused by the budget deficit. Devaluation of the Belgian franc on March 31, 1935 added to fears that the French currency might follow suit. The exchange rate of the franc slumped and a considerable flight of capital set in. From March through June the Bank of France lost 11,617 million francs worth of gold.<sup>10</sup> Under these circumstances, the cabinet saw no alternative but to make another attempt to balance the budget and restore confidence in the government's credit. On May 28 Premier Flandin requested from Parliament sweeping powers to improve the state's finances and bring about economic recovery. Three days later a section of the Right which disliked M. Flandin

combined with the Left to vote down the request, bringing about the government's resignation.

The succeeding cabinet, headed by the president of the Chamber, Fernand Bouisson, was voted out of office almost immediately on June 4 after presenting a similar request for special powers which failed to win the approval of the Radical Socialists. An attempt by François Piétri to form a government with more limited powers failed, in part because the Bank of France intimated that only drastic budgetary deflation would enable it to continue to discount Treasury bonds.<sup>11</sup> Pierre Laval's adroit tactics proved more successful. After forming another Government of National Union, he succeeded in persuading Parliament to accord him full powers on June 8 by a vote of 324 to 160. The decree powers, extending till the end of October, covered all measures necessary "to fight speculation and defend the franc." All decrees were to be ratified by Parliament before January 1, 1936.

Equipped with these extensive powers, the Laval ministry embarked on the most drastic and thoroughgoing deflation. From July 16 to October 31, 1935 it issued 549 decree laws. A reduction of 10 per cent was imposed on the disbursements not only of the National Government, but of local communes and *départements*, colonies and protectorates, public service concessions like the railways, and subsidized enterprises, such as shipping companies. This involved, with some minor exceptions, a flat 10 per cent cut in all salaries and wages and a similar reduction in interest payments on all government bonds. For the first time the government also took steps to bring about a corresponding general decline in the cost of living. Rental charges for houses, apartments and farms were arbitrarily reduced 10 per cent and a compensating cut was ordered in mortgage interest rates. The prices of a number of important commodities and services—gas, electricity, coal, bread and potash fertilizers—were also lowered, and a beginning was made with the liberalization of import quotas.<sup>12</sup>

A number of decrees ran counter to the general policy of deflation. Public works were speeded up and measures taken to raise prices of agricultural products which had undergone a sharp slump. With the cooperation of the Bank of France, improved credit facilities were accorded to wheat growers, enabling them to keep their harvest off

7. Cf. "Le Budget, la Trésorerie et la Dette Publique," *Revue d'Economie Politique*, May-June 1935.

8. On these loans, which were not to exceed a total of 10 billion francs and were to be spread over six years, the National Government undertook to meet part of the interest and amortization charges up to a maximum of 2,897 million francs. Cf. *Le Temps*, May 17, July 7 and October 5, 1934.

9. Cf. the annual report of the Bank of France, *Le Temps*, January 31, 1936.

10. *Report of the Finance Commission of the Chamber of Deputies on the 1936 Budget*, cited, pp. 33-34.

11. "Histoire de la Crise Ministérielle," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, June 15, 1935.

12. For a list and analysis of all the decrees, cf. *Report of the Finance Commission of the Chamber of Deputies on the 1936 Budget*, cited, pp. 45-80; also C. J. Gignoux, "La Politique des décrets-lois," *Revue Politique et Parlementaire*, October 1935.

the market.<sup>13</sup> Similar facilities were provided for wine producers, who in addition were compelled to scale their sales.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand the government, by a decree of October 31, abolished as too expensive the subsidized removal of wheat surplus and instituted a new system under which it will be able every year to confiscate without compensation any surplus appearing on the market.<sup>15</sup>

#### FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The decrees reduced National Government expenditures for 1936 by about 5,500 million francs,<sup>16</sup> local budgets by 1,385 million and the outlay of French railways by 2,316 million.<sup>17</sup> Although the Radical Socialist and Socialist members of the Chamber's Finance Commission threatened for a time to undo many of the savings thus effected, the economies were finally incorporated in the 1936 budget with only minor changes. Appropriations under the ordinary budget for 1936 total a little over 40 billion francs as compared with about 48 billion the year before and a maximum of more than 53 billion for 1930-1931. The actual reduction in public expenditure, however, is much less than it appears. In addition to the regular budget, the government has secured the approval of extraordinary appropriations totaling 6,230 million francs which are to be defrayed by loans. This amount, which is almost entirely for armaments, includes about 2½ billion francs ordinarily incorporated in the regular budget. Government finances, although improved, still leave much to be desired. For 1935 the general budget deficit amounted to at least five billion francs and the railways showed a deficit almost as large. According to the most conservative estimates new borrowing by the Treasury during 1936 will total a minimum of 10 billion francs, exclusive of the amount needed to cover the anticipated railway deficit.<sup>18</sup> This will add further to the heavy national debt which has already increased about 70 billion francs in the last five years and now absorbs 35 per cent of the government's entire income.<sup>19</sup> The Treasury has found it so difficult to borrow in France that it was compelled in February 1936

to make an arrangement with London bankers for a credit of £40,000,000.<sup>20</sup>

Economically France has experienced no marked improvement. In fact, practically all business indices reached their lowest level in 1935 and, had it not been for large expenditures on armaments, economic activity might have declined even more. No further retrogression, however, has taken place since the middle of 1935, and here and there evidence of some slight recovery may be found. In January 1936 the number of unemployed on public relief for the first time fell slightly below that for the corresponding month of the previous year. The index for industrial production has moved up a few points from the low point reached in May 1935. Perhaps the most encouraging factor is the decrease in the disparity between foreign and French prices which has taken place over the past two years. In July 1935 wholesale prices of imported products, for example, were about the same as in 1933 and 3 per cent above the 1934 level, while those of domestic goods had declined 19 per cent from the 1933 and 14 per cent from the 1934 average. The cost of living in Paris during the third quarter of 1935 was about 10 per cent lower than in 1933, and 16 per cent less than in 1929. In the provinces the decline was considerably greater. Since July of last year wholesale prices have again risen, and the cost of living for the last quarter of 1935 was also higher. Although prices and costs are apparently no longer subject to such downward pressure as before, it may be doubted that they have been sufficiently lowered to compensate fully for the devaluation and depreciation of foreign currencies. The franc is probably still overvalued to the extent of 15 to 20 per cent,<sup>21</sup> and this constitutes a serious obstacle to recovery.

#### CONTROVERSY OVER FOREIGN POLICY

It seemed at first as if the foreign policy of the National Governments would be more successful in gaining support than some of their other measures. The resurgence of a powerful Germany tended to unify opinions on foreign affairs. The refusal of French governments to admit the legality of German rearmament met with general assent, and there was no serious opposition to counter-measures providing for the rapid completion of French fortifications and the strengthening of air and naval forces. Even the Socialists did not ener-

20. *New York Times*, February 18, 1936.

21. The *London Economist* of January 25, 1936 expresses the belief that "France has carried the deflation to the point at which it is no longer able to attain equilibrium."

13. "Le Financement de la Récolte de Blé," *La Situation Economique et Financière*, August 23, 1935.

14. *Ibid.*, September 13 and December 27, 1935.

15. "Recent Changes in French Wheat Legislation," *Foreign Crops and Markets*, December 16, 1935.

16. *Report of the Finance Commission of the Chamber of Deputies on the 1936 Budget*, cited.

17. Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Démocratie et Nationalisme," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, Ju-

getically oppose these measures, and after the conclusion of the Franco-Soviet pact on May 2, 1935 the Communists were greatly embarrassed by Stalin's public endorsement of France's national defense policy.<sup>22</sup> The Left welcomed the Franco-Soviet pact of mutual assistance, which was initiated by a conservative, M. Louis Barthou, as Foreign Minister in the Doumergue government and concluded by his successor, Pierre Laval. The opposition which subsequently developed to this pact came primarily from the Right rather than the Left. Fear of Germany also aided in obtaining almost unanimous approval at first for the agreement of January 7, 1935, which settled most of the outstanding differences between Italy and France and made possible Italy's enlistment in the anti-German bloc. The Franco-Italian accord, however, contained the seeds of the subsequent serious divergence between Right and Left on the direction of French foreign policy. Although the French were and are unwilling to become involved in war, M. Laval's complacent attitude toward Italian aggression in Ethiopia was regarded by the entire Left as a betrayal of fundamental principles of French policy which had always been based on support and reinforcement of the League of Nations. When Laval gave only half-hearted backing to the efforts of Britain and other countries to defend the League Covenant against Italy, he alienated his Radical Socialist supporters. The abortive Hoare-Laval agreement gave rise to a sharp attack on Laval's policy. On December 29 the government received a vote of confidence of 296 to 276, but only after Premier Laval had won over a number of Radical Socialist supporters by a last-minute speech stressing his attachment to the League. Even so, 93 of the 152 Radical Socialist deputies voted against the government.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, this fundamental difference over foreign policy was an important factor in bringing about the withdrawal of the Radical Socialist Ministers from the Cabinet and the fall of the Government of National Union on January 22, 1936.

## THE OFFENSIVE AGAINST FASCISM

After the political agitation of the preceding years and the serious rioting of January and February 1934, the governments of Doumergue and his successors were to bring France a much needed "political truce." In reality a "truce" was never es-

22. Marcel Déat, "M. Staline approuve," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, May 25, 1935.

23. *Le Temps*, December 30, 1935.

tablished. The press of the Right continued in 1934 and 1935 to make violent attacks on the Radical Socialists despite their collaboration in the government, and many Radical Socialists in turn strove constantly to undermine the governmental coalition. Outside the government and Parliament, the country has split into two opposing camps. On one side are the anti-parliamentary groups and organizations which have been more or less defended by the parties of the Right. On the other side are the parties and associations of the Left, which have united in a common anti-Fascist front and regard themselves as the defenders of parliamentary government and democratic liberties.

## CROIX DE FEU AND FRONT PAYSAN

The so-called Fascist organizations, or *ligues* as they are known in France, utilized and in turn stimulated the popular discontent with parliamentary institutions and politicians which rapidly increased during 1932 and 1933. Following the sanguinary rioting of February 1934, the combined strength of the *ligues*<sup>24</sup> continued to grow. The *Croix de Feu*, led by François de La Rocque, a retired Lieutenant-Colonel with a distinguished war record, became the most prominent of these organizations. Its rapid rise is probably attributable to superior leadership and discipline, the avoidance of extremism, and a policy of careful recruitment to keep out "undesirable" elements which might injure its cause. The *Croix de Feu* proper includes only veterans who served with distinction during the war. An auxiliary organization, the *Volontaires Nationaux* or National Volunteers, comprises the sons of these men, while another, the *Regroupement National autour des Croix de Feu*, embraces all sympathizers with the movement. The combined strength of these groups, which totaled less than 200,000 early in 1934, was placed by one of its spokesmen at 712,000 toward the end of 1935.<sup>25</sup> Its strength, its almost military discipline, and its practice of holding frequent "secret mobilizations" have seriously alarmed the anti-Fascist forces.

The *Croix de Feu*<sup>26</sup> despises the old political parties with their platforms, shibboleths and slogans, and claims that the primary need of France is not another program but a government of honest,

24. For a description of these organizations and their doctrines, cf. Raymond Millet and Simon Arbellot, *Ligues et Groupements* (Paris, Edition du Temps, 1935); also deWilde, "Political Ferment in France," cited.

25. Cf. statement of Deputy Ybarnégaray in the Chamber of Deputies, *Le Temps*, December 29, 1935.

26. *Re*



capable men who will place the national welfare above the selfish interests of individuals, parties and economic groups. It would realize in France the spirit of fraternity and national reconciliation born in the trenches during the war. For this reason it bitterly opposes communism and socialism which espouse the doctrine of class struggle, and the parliamentary system which in its opinion divides Frenchmen into numerous political factions oblivious of the national interest. It would apparently not abolish Parliament but limit its powers, strengthen the executive, and secure the collaboration of a national economic council in its legislative work. Economically it would organize industry, agriculture and the professions along corporate and regional lines. The *Croix de Feu* repudiates, however, any thought of a "totalitarian" state. In foreign policy the movement is nationalist, advocating the strengthening and coordination of national defense as the only real guarantee of French security.<sup>27</sup>

The past year has also witnessed the rapid rise of a rural Fascist movement known as the Peasant Front (*Front Paysan*) or Green Shirts, led by the colorful and dynamic Henri Dorgères. It is particularly strong in Brittany. This movement has taken a definitely anti-parliamentary stand in protest against the deflation of agricultural prices, particularly under the Flandin régime, and the alleged inefficiency and ineptitude of the government. It is equally resentful of the profits exacted by middlemen, millers and the so-called fertilizers' trust. Frankly illegal in its methods, it advocates and organizes open resistance to the payment of taxes, the foreclosure of mortgages and the application of the social insurance laws which it regards as too burdensome for the farmers. It demands the end of deflation and revalorization of farm products. The state would be reorganized along corporate and regional lines, with intervention from the Centre reduced to a minimum.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the growth of the *Croix de Feu* and the Peasant Front, the Fascist or pseudo-Fascist groups have been put more and more on the defensive during the last two years by the increasing cohesion and unity of the Left. Alarmed by the rioting of

February 1934 and impressed by the triumph of fascism in Germany and Austria over the divided forces of the opposition, the Left has drawn together in a common anti-Fascist front. The decisive and spontaneous impulse in the formation of this Front came primarily from the rank and file of the labor unions and the political parties of the Left. It brought about the conclusion of a "united action" pact by the Socialists and Communists, and the initiation of negotiations looking toward the fusion of these proletarian parties. Later it led to the organic unity of the two rival labor union federations and the formation of the Popular Front, embracing—in addition to the Communists and Socialists—the Radical Socialists and all other parties and organizations of the Left.

#### RAPPROCHEMENT OF SOCIALISTS AND COMMUNISTS

Agreement between Socialists and Communists was not easy to achieve. The Communist party had long been hostile to the "bourgeois" Socialist party and scornful of parliamentary government. After the February 1934 riots, however, the Communists became gradually convinced that doctrinaire opposition to the Socialists would in the end only benefit the Right. Negotiations for a rapprochement began in earnest during March 1934. Many difficulties were encountered, and it was not until after the annual congress of the Communist party at the end of June that the negotiations took a decisive turn. On July 27, 1934 an agreement for united action was concluded.<sup>29</sup> In this pact the two parties undertook to wage a joint campaign against fascism through common meetings and demonstrations, and to assist each other against Fascist opponents. Among the objectives of the Front the agreement listed disarmament and dissolution of the *ligues*, defense of democratic liberties, abrogation of the decree laws, and resistance to preparations for war.<sup>30</sup>

The success of this pact gave a great impulse to the movement to re-establish the organic unity between the proletarian parties which had been disrupted after the World War. Negotiations for the creation of a single workers' party began in April 1935, when the Communists and the Party of Proletarian Unity accepted the Socialist suggestion to participate in a Commission of Unification.<sup>31</sup> The Socialists, however, have been unwilling to accept all the conditions on which the

27. For the doctrines of the *Croix de Feu*, cf. Lt.-Colonel de La Rocque, *Service Public* (Paris, Grasset, 1934), and *Disciplines d'Action* (Paris, Editions de France, 1935); Henry Malherbe, *Un Chef, des Actes, des Idées* (Paris, Plon, 1934); also Georges Suarez, "Du Colonel de La Rocque à M. Bergery," *Revue de Paris*, March 1935.

28. Cf. "Verrons-nous se faire un Regroupement National," *La Revue Hebdomadaire*, November 16, 1935; Bertrand de Jouvenel, "Le Front Paysan," *Revue de Paris*, December 1, 1935; Henri Dorgères, "Le Mouvement Paysan et le Régime," *Le Mois*, April-May 1935.

29. For a history of the negotiations, cf. "La Marche à l'Unité d'Action antifasciste," *Le Populaire*, February 10, 1935.

30. *Le Populaire*, July 27, 1934.

31. Labour and Socialist International, *International Information*, April 27, 1935.

Communist party insists.<sup>32</sup> They concur in the necessity of a proletarian dictatorship for the transitional period from capitalism to socialism, but want to limit its duration and decline to admit that it should necessarily be exercised through soviets on the Russian model. They are eager to oppose imperialist bourgeois wars, but will not accept the Communist contention that the new party should undertake to support the Soviet Union unconditionally. The Socialists also insist on greater democracy in the structure of the proposed party than the Communists are willing to accept. Further difficulties have developed regarding the international affiliation of the new party.<sup>33</sup>

#### TRADE UNION UNITY

In the unification of the trade unions the Communists were much more conciliatory. After the split between the Communist and Socialist parties in 1920, a parallel division occurred in the labor unions. The moderates remained in the old *Confédération Générale du Travail* or General Confederation of Labor, while the Communists formed their own *Confédération Générale du Travail Unitaire* or Unitary Confederation of Labor. The first, under Léon Jouhaux, was primarily Socialist in sympathy, but by no means an organ of the Socialist party. In 1935 it included about 900,000 members, of whom two-thirds were public servants. The second became an adjunct of the Communist party and totaled in 1935 between three and four hundred thousand members, of whom the majority were manual workers.<sup>34</sup> Many attempts had been made to re-unify these rival labor organizations, but the first real sign of a common purpose came on February 12, 1934, when they simultaneously staged a one-day general strike in protest against the rioting of February 6 and the formation of a National Government. Negotiations to bring about organic unity soon began, but they lagged until the workers took the initiative in promoting fusion locally. The Communist labor federation finally accepted practically all of the conditions made by Jouhaux's organization. An accord providing for the complete fusion of the two federa-

tions was concluded on September 27, 1935. The Communists agreed that the new organization would be entirely independent of political parties and would not permit the formation of separate groups designed to influence its policy. They yielded also on their demand for proportional representation. Thus, in reality, the Communists agreed to enter *en masse* the General Confederation of Labor.<sup>35</sup> By the end of January 1936 the work of fusion had been almost entirely carried out.<sup>36</sup> A congress of the Unified Confederation held at Toulouse March 2-5 decided that the new organization should be affiliated with the International Syndicalist Federation rather than the Communist Trade Union International.<sup>36a</sup>

#### THE POPULAR FRONT

Soon after the conclusion of the "united action" pact in July 1934, the Communists began to press for an enlargement of the anti-Fascist front to embrace bourgeois groups, such as the Radical Socialists. In a complete reversal of their former stand, they urged on the Socialists the drafting of a moderate social and economic program which would draw these bourgeois elements into the anti-Fascist fold. Paradoxically, the Communists constantly insisted on keeping such a program free from Socialist planks which might alarm the middle class, while the Socialists protested that to pretend the economic crisis could be solved by measures short of socialism would disillusion and alienate this class ultimately.<sup>37</sup> The aims of the Communists were finally achieved by the formation of the Popular Front, a loose federation of all anti-Fascist parties and groups. This Front has its origins in the great demonstration staged on Bastille Day, July 14, 1935. To commemorate this anniversary of the French Revolution, three anti-Fascist and non-party groups<sup>38</sup> invited the labor unions and all parties and groups of the Left to join in a huge demonstration against fascism. On July 14 some 300,000 people participated in the first demonstration of the Popular Front.<sup>39</sup> The participants took an oath to remain united to work

32. For an outline of these conditions, cf. Florimond Bonte, "Parti unique du prolétariat et problèmes du pouvoir," *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, November 15, 1935.

33. For accounts and discussions of the negotiations, cf. Jacques Duclos, "Vive l'Unité," *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, November 15, 1935; Jean Zyromski, "Sur le chemin de l'unité," *Le Populaire*, December 8, 1935; Jean Lebas, "Pour l'information sur l'unité organique," *ibid.*, January 2, 1936; report by Léon Blum before the Extraordinary Socialist Congress, *ibid.*, February 2, 1936; for texts of proposals and counter-proposals, cf. *Le Populaire*, November 21 and December 12, 1935.

34. Frédéric, *Etat des Forces en France*, cited, pp. 47-48.

35. Pierre Dominique, "L'Unité syndicale est faite," *L'Europe Nouvelle*, October 5, 1935; Gere, "Trade Union Unity in France," *The Communist International*, October 1935; also Julien Racamond, "Les communistes et le mouvement syndical," *Cahiers du Bolchévisme*, November 1, 1935.

36. *Le Populaire*, January 29, 1936.

36a. *Le Temps*, March 5, 1936.

37. *Ibid.*, December 28, 1934, January 20, March 15, 1935.

38. *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme*, *Comité Mondial de lutte pour la Paix et la Liberté* (*Comité Amsterdam-Pleyel*), and *Comité de Vigilance des Intellectuels antifascistes*.

39. Cf. Alexander Werth, *The New Statesman and Nation*, July 20, 1935.

for international peace, secure the dissolution of the Fascist *ligues* and defend democracy.

Encouraged by this initial effort, the associated organizations, ultimately numbering 96, agreed to establish a permanent Central Committee for this Popular Front, of which M. Victor Basch, president of the League of the Rights of Men, became chairman. After five months of effort the Popular Front agreed in January 1936 on a program of minimum demands. As the Communists had originally suggested, this program was kept moderate and excluded Socialist planks. Its significance is not entirely clear, since each of the parties has its own candidates in the elections, and the Popular Front itself has named no candidates. Support of the minimum demands of the Popular Front will, however, be required of candidates on the second ballot who ask for the united assistance of the Left.<sup>40</sup>

The anti-Fascists have been strong enough to compel Parliament to adopt legislation directed against the *ligues*. Under pressure from the Radical Socialists, the Laval cabinet on October 23, 1935 issued a series of decrees for the "defense of the Republic."<sup>41</sup> The Left, however, demanded more drastic legislation, especially after a clash between the *Croix de Feu* and an anti-Fascist counter-demonstration at Limoges on November 16 had resulted in a number of deaths and injuries. Accusing the government of tolerating "Fascist outrages," the Left was threatening defeat of the cabinet when, on December 6, a spokesman for the *Croix de Feu*, Deputy Jean Ybarnégaray, dramatically proposed the disarmament of all political groups. Making adroit use of this offer, Léon Blum forced Ybarnégaray to consent not only to disarmament, but also to the dissolution of all military and semi-military political formations. Thereupon Premier Laval immediately introduced three bills authorizing the dissolution of "all associations having the character of groups of combat or private militias," prohibiting the carrying of firearms and severely punishing incitement to murder in the press. The Left made these bills still more drastic, providing in particular that the government rather than the courts should have the right of dissolution. The bills passed Parliament late in December and were promulgated on January 12, 1936.<sup>42</sup> While the Laval government took no action under these laws, the Sarraut min-

istry on February 13 disbanded by decree all Royalist organizations after the Royalist *Camelots du Roi* had attacked and severely injured the Socialist leader, Léon Blum. With the threat of dissolution hanging over them, the other *ligues* have become extremely cautious. The Left, however, does not intend to rest until all of them are dissolved.

## ISSUES OF THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

The Popular Front is waging the electoral campaign primarily on the issue of fascism. It claims to be the defender of democratic government and individual liberty and accuses the parties of the Right of encouraging and protecting the *ligues*. The Right denounces the professed loyalty of the Left to democratic institutions as hypocritical. It suspects that the conversion of the Communists to democracy is little more than a temporary expedient, and can point out that even the Socialists have always recognized, at least in theory, the necessity of a proletarian dictatorship to pave the way to socialism. The issue is therefore by no means as clear-cut as it appears on first examination. The entire Right can hardly be regarded as Fascist, although it has tended to defend and even encourage anti-parliamentary organizations as a check on radicalism and a curb on Parliament. On the other hand, one may question the devotion to democracy and individual liberties of those elements in the Popular Front whose ultimate aim is the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. It might also be recalled that, prior to February 1934, certain people now prominent in the Popular Front—notably Daladier, Cot and Frot—sought in vain to establish a "strong" government composed of leading personalities from both the Right and the Left.<sup>43</sup>

With France still deep in the depression, economic issues play a leading rôle in the elections. The Left opposes deflation, leans toward some form of planned economy and promises to curb or destroy the economic and financial "oligarchy." The Right in general champions a conservative program modeled on the policies of the Laval government, decries economic planning, and tries to persuade the French public that the policies of the Left would lead straight to devaluation and inflation. The Left has a wealth of economic programs, most of which propose some form of planning.<sup>44-5</sup> The program of the Popular Front, con-

40. For the formation, history and program of the Popular Front, cf. Jacques Kayser, "Le Rassemblement Populaire et ses Buts," *Journal des Nations*, November 17-18, 1935, and articles by Raymond Millet, *Le Temps*, January 9 and 10, 1936.

41. *Le Temps*, October 25, 1935.

42. For text, cf. *ibid.*, January 13, 1936.

43. Cf. Alexander Werth, "The End of Laval?" *The New Statesman and Nation*, January 25, 1936; also Bernard Faÿ, "French News from France," *The Commonwealth*, January 10, 1936.

44-5. "Plans et Programmes," Supplément, *L'Europe Nouvelle*, January 25, 1936.

taining the minimum demands of all Left groups, advocates the nationalization of the arms industry and the Bank of France.<sup>46</sup> Although the Popular Front proposes a number of measures which might have an inflationary effect on prices, it has refused to face the question whether the execution of its program would entail devaluation of the franc.<sup>47</sup>

The Left has always been critical of big business and finance. Powerful industrial interests such as the *Comité des Forges*, the organ of the steel and armament industry, the *Comité Central des Houillères*, representing the coal mining concerns, and the large banks have always exerted great influence behind the scenes of French politics.<sup>48</sup> In the present electoral campaign the Left is concentrating its attack on the Bank of France, which it regards as the key stronghold of the conservative financial and industrial interests. The Bank is a private institution, although the government appoints the governor, two under-governors and three regents. In fact, the Bank is controlled by private banking and industrial interests.<sup>49</sup> To break up this oligarchy and end its alleged dictation of the government's financial policy, the Popular Front proposes to nationalize the Bank.<sup>50</sup>

Foreign policy is usually a minor issue in French politics, but in recent months the Italo-Ethiopian war and the repudiation of the Locarno agreement has greatly increased its importance. The Left accuses the Right of betraying the League of Nations and alienating Britain by its lukewarm opposition to Italy's Ethiopian venture. According to the Left, the French failure to support the League more wholeheartedly encouraged Germany to denounce the Locarno treaty. The Right, on the other hand, holds the Left responsible for antagonizing Italy and attacks the Communists and the Soviet Union for allegedly wanting to precipitate war with Germany. "The Popular Front Means War" (*Le Front Populaire, c'est la Guerre*) is the electoral slogan of many conservatives. In reality, the issue is by no means so clear-cut. On the Right and Centre there are many sincere advocates of sanctions against Italy as well as Germany, while the adherents to the Popular Front are not all enthusiastic exponents of collective security. Edouard Daladier, for example, is known to be rather indifferent to the League.

What will the elections bring to France? A Popular Front victory is widely predicted. Due to its greater cohesion, the Left has a distinct electoral

advantage over the Right, whose forces are divided. If the Left wins, will it be able to form a stable, constructive government, or will its electoral triumph go for naught—as in 1924 and 1932? On the answer to this question hinges the future of democratic, parliamentary government in France. The formation of the Popular Front has temporarily removed whatever Fascist menace existed, but only a stable governmental coalition of the Left can permanently eliminate it.

The prospects for a successful Left government are not entirely favorable. The formation of a Popular Front government will meet with difficulties. Many conservative Radical Socialists are reluctant to share power with the proletarian parties. The Communists, who will probably return to Parliament greatly strengthened, have already announced their refusal to participate in a bourgeois government;<sup>51</sup> and up to the present the Socialists have not been much more favorably inclined toward participation.<sup>52</sup> Even if the Communists and Socialists decide to support a minority Radical Socialist ministry which promises to carry out the program of the Popular Front, their support may prove exceedingly precarious and lead in the end to a situation similar to that prevailing in 1932 and 1933. The only alternative will then be another Government of National Union. Such a coalition cabinet may be much less stable than in the present Parliament, for the Centre and perhaps also the Right will have been weakened by the elections. France may thus face an impasse from which only a strong non-parliamentary government will be able to rescue it. On the other hand, economic and political conditions today are not like those in the period from 1932 to 1934. France has already reached the lowest point of the economic depression; and aided by the revival in other countries, it may well witness during the next few years a gradual improvement which will greatly relieve the parties in power. Devaluation of the franc, which informed circles now regard as inevitable, may still create considerable trouble for a Left government. Most important of all, the experience of the past has impressed the Left with the need for cohesion not only during but after the elections.

51. Cf. resolution voted unanimously by the Communist party congress of January 24, 1936, *L'Humanité*, January 25, 1936.

52. The question of participation will presumably be debated at the annual Socialist Congress which is to meet early in June 1936. The 1935 Socialist Congress confirmed a resolution adopted by the administrative commission of the party on November 7, 1934, which envisaged the possibility of ministerial participation in exceptional circumstances of great economic distress and danger to the preservation of freedom. Cf. *Parti Socialiste, XXXII<sup>e</sup> Congrès National tenu à Mulhouse les 9, 10, 11 et 12 juin 1935* (Paris, Librairie Populaire, 1935), p. 568.

46. *Le Temps*, January 11, 1936.

47. *Ibid.*

48. Frédéric, *Etat des Forces en France*, cited, pp. 86-112.

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-5.

50. *Le Temps*, January 11, 1936.